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ABSTRACT

This publication is intended to help parents address their children's needs and emotions when the family is moving from one place to another. Detailed information and tips are provided on several moving-related issues, including: (1) how children respond to change; (2) how parents respond to change; (3) preparing children for the move; (4) the moving process; (5) settling in; (6) moving to a new school; (7) moving to new child care; (8) if children have problems; (9) stay-at-home parents; and (10) frequent moves. A table of child development stages is included. (Contains 12 references.) (EV)

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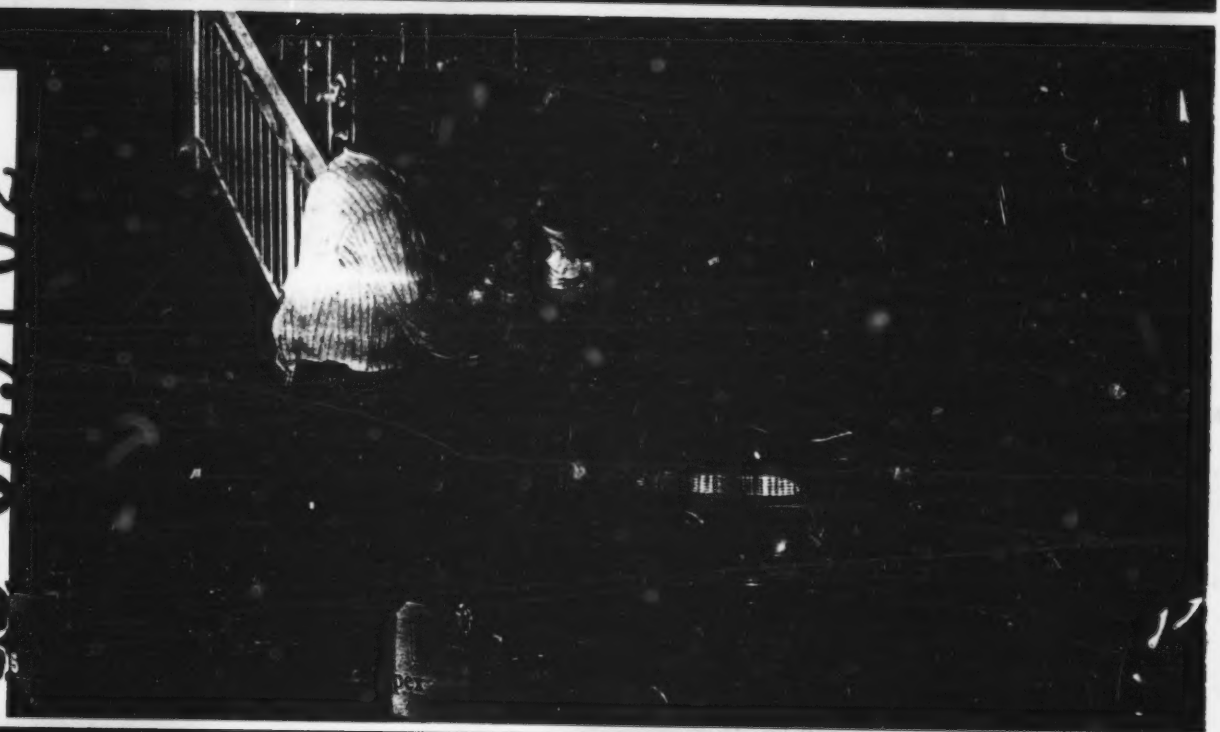
MOVING HOUSE WITH CHILDREN



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Home is Where the Family is

Moving House with Children

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About the Author

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Pam Linke manages the Child and Youth Health website which has information for parents on parenting, child behaviour, and child health. Pam trained as a social worker and has done further studies in children's literature and early education. She is the author of other books including *Pants Aren't Rude*, *Let's Stop Bullying*, *Babies and Practical Parenting 1–5*, and *Practical Parenting 6–12*. She is involved at national and state levels with the National Investment for the Early Years, the National Association for Infant Mental Health, and the Australian Early Childhood Association.

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Notes

This book uses examples from families who have a member in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) who move house frequently. However, many other occupations also involve moving house, and the information about moving with children is relevant to all families.

In order to avoid gender bias 'she' and 'he' are used alternately throughout the book.

Home is Where the Family is

Moving House with Children

Introduction

Moving house is about change. For parents it is usually about change of employment, change of environment, change of social group—loss of some people and things that were important, and at the same time finding new opportunities and pleasures. For young children the change can have a greater impact than for adults or older children because they don't have the experience of previous changes to remember and build on.

All through our lives we live with and manage change. The impact of change is different for each of us, depending on our own sense of security, our previous experiences, and what the particular change means to us. What seems a small change to one person may be very large and exciting or scary to another. Young children especially may be more affected by what seems a small change to adults, for example moving from a cot to a bed. On the other hand, they may not seem to notice a really big change such as the loss of a parent's job.

To help children manage, learn from, and build on change is one of the most important gifts that parents can give to their children.

Home is where the family is.

Relationships matter much more than

the place where you live.

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...oving house, like other changes, can lead to feelings of excitement about what is to come as well as to some fears and anxiety. Usually it is a mixture of all of these.

As children grow up they face many changes. They learn new skills and new ways of being as they move towards independence. At the same time their parents are getting used to the changes in their children. Some of this is about exciting developments such as when your children first learn to walk and talk. These changes also bring challenges; for example learning to walk means that you have to think of new ways to look after toddlers and make your home safe.

If you understand what is happening as children go through the different stages of development it can help you to know how to help them manage changes. (See Children's development, pages 34–37.)

We hope this book will help you to help your children develop the skills and understanding to know how to manage change, which is a lot of what life is really about.

If you understand what is happening as children go through the different stages of development it can help you to know how to help them manage changes.

Moving house can produce a mixture of feelings

Chapter 2

Change and Parents

Moving is an opportunity to think about your home and family and to make some changes and choices that can add new pleasure and enjoyment to your family life.

Jenny (spouse): *'We can only go home to my family at Christmas every few years and the people where we live now all have their own family for Christmas. So we have learned to have Christmas with just us and to make that special.'*

The thing that impacts most on how children feel and manage change is how their parents feel and cope. If the parents are looking forward to the move and preparing with enthusiasm, children, especially young children, are likely to feel much more positive about it.

Parents' feelings

Look for the good things the change brings. Talk about your feelings about the move, both positive and negative, with your partner. If your partner is not available, share your feelings with friends, particularly friends who are in the same situation.

How children manage change will depend on their parents' attitudes

Differences in expectations

Sometimes one parent looks forward to a move more positively than the other. This may be because he or she has the excitement of a new job, and a group of people to support the change, while the other partner has to leave a job. It may be because of leaving friendships or a home where you have been happy. Or perhaps one partner feels he or she has no power over what is happening. Try to find ways to help each other with these problems.

Managing differences

Think about what you can do to include the needs of both partners in the planning. Some things that can help are:

- plan time for saying goodbye to friends and for visiting them after the move.
- both partners need to have as much 'say' as possible over how the move takes place, where you will live, etc.
- look in advance for employment for the partner who is leaving a job.
- make a special effort to support the partner who is at home until he or she makes new friendships and networks.

Organise some 'couple' time as well as parent time, packing time, planning time, and so on. Talk about your own feelings and listen to your partner's. (Even if you can't do what the other person wants, it helps them to know that you understand and care about their feelings.)

It helps to tell children what you are feeling rather than pretend it is not happening. Children will know that something is different, and if they don't know what it is they are likely to make up something in their own minds or think they have done something wrong. For example, you could say something like: 'I am looking forward to starting in a new place but I am feeling sad, too, because I won't be able to see my friends so often.'

If you are worried about the future, it will help if you can do something about your anxiety, as children very quickly pick up on this and become anxious themselves. You could try writing down the things you are worried about and then list some ways you could help yourself or get help to overcome the worries.

(If you have feelings that can't be resolved and they continue to interfere with your daily life and relationships you might get some professional counselling so that you cope as well as you can and you can help your children. Don't let anger impact on your child.)

Children need to see that their parents support each other, especially in times of change.

Chapter 3

Preparing Children for the Move

Moving can make a stronger bond within the family unit as the family members need to depend on each other.

If it is managed well, children can learn new skills and strengths from the experience of moving.

The things that will be important to your children when you move are:

- time with you;
- time to do their own moving, e.g. packing up toys, saying goodbye to friends; and
- knowing that the people they depend on are still there for them.

Plan the move ahead as much as you can so you can plan in time to spend with your children at every stage. If you know you are going to have a very rushed few days, it can help children if there is a close adult friend or relative to be with them at this time. It is good for children to see at least some of the packing up so they understand what is happening.

Be ready to answer children's questions as fully as you can. You might like to write away for some information about your new home or look the place up on the Internet or in a book.

When to tell children

For children who are over the toddler stage, tell them about the move and include them in the planning as soon as you can. Knowing about something new and being involved are really helpful in feeling part of it.

For young toddlers, it is best not to tell them too far ahead, as they can't really understand what the move means.

How to tell children

Tell your children what the move means to your family, e.g. a new, exciting job for Mum or Dad. Young children will see it in terms of what it means to their lives—the friends, places, activities they will leave behind and find

in the new place. Talk to them about what there will be for them at the new home—what special activities will be possible, what relatives will be closer, how they can keep in touch with their old friends, and what arrangements you can make to help them keep on with their favourite hobbies.

Children can be helped to understand through stories about moving. For very young children, simple and rhythmic stories with pictures are best. The stories should show some of the negative feelings as well as the positive ones. If you can't find a suitable story for your children, you could make one up about your family moving. Young children do best if the story is repeated often rather than just read once. Older children may want to make up their own book of drawings and words about moving. You can use photos to make the book real.

As with all changes, moving will be easier for those children who have lots of family support and who feel good about themselves, and more difficult for children who have already had other stresses in their lives, for example:

- for a toddler, a new baby in the family;
- for older children, low self-esteem, school problems, etc.

So, if possible, try to arrange it so there aren't other changes at the time of the move, e.g. cot to a bed, or getting rid of old toys (much as this seems a good opportunity to do so). Changes that seem small to adults are often big changes for children.

Children need to know that the people they depend on are still there for them

Step-families and separated families

If you have children from another relationship, it is important to discuss the move with their other parent as soon as possible, especially if it means moving the children away from near him or her. You will need to plan how your children can remain close to both of you. Perhaps you need to plan for more regular phone calls, or longer visits less often, rather than frequent short ones. Even if sometimes you would prefer not to have all this trouble, it is important for children to feel that both their parents are involved in their lives. Computers can keep families in touch by email, which you can use to send photos, copies of reports, etc., between homes.

Reassure the children that they can still be in close touch with their other parent.

Make sure that your children do not miss out on any immunisations or health checks or medical appointments because of the move. If this does happen, arrange for a catch-up as soon as possible.

Some suggestions for involving children in planning

'There are good parts about moving, too, because you see lots of places that people only see on a map. Especially when you have to drive in a car for days—Australia is so big!'—Simon (8).

For older children

- Put up a large calendar so children can mark off each day until the move. If you are feeling creative you could make up your own calendar for the last week or two, with flaps to lift and under each flap a small picture or note about something good they will find at the new home. (Or a friend could do this for you.)
- Talk about the move as an adventure that will have exciting new discoveries in the house, the garden, the neighbourhood, and the town. It will help your

Take your children to see their new school or centre

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children to look forward to it. For example, 'I wonder what plants we will find in our new garden.'

- A map of the new neighbourhood, with schools and play places, etc. and children's activities marked, will help. This could include parks, playgrounds, library, swimming pool, sports centre, church, clubs, and places that are special attractions of your new home. Stick on pictures for younger children.
- Some parents make up a kit for older children, a bit like a travel agent's kit with brochures about the attractions of the new place. Include some personal attractions that you know your children enjoy, e.g. a voucher to a new fast food restaurant, and/or a voucher for you to take them for a trip to a beach or park or other attraction.
- If you can, visit your new home in advance with the children. Take time to explore the neighbourhood and where the play places are. Take them to see their new school.
- If your children are learning an activity or craft or are in groups they enjoy, make contact with these in the new area.
- Teach your children their new address and phone number.
- Keep a big list in a place where everyone can see the steps and stages of the move. Older children can write the things that are important to them on the list.
- Make a special book about the move, for each child to write or draw or paste something in it each day. Start from a few weeks before the move and keep it going for a few weeks afterwards. Entries don't need to be long. They can include things such as what the children did that day towards moving, a picture of something they liked at their old house, what they think or feel, what someone said. The book can become a journal to show what they achieved over the time, and will be useful to keep for future moves. You can look back at the book with them and talk about where they have come from and what they can do now that they couldn't do before, new interests, etc. When you are very busy and stressed, this can seem like a lot to do, but it will be worth it.

Note: Children at school may find that their friends start to look for new friends when they find out that your children are leaving. This is a kind of self-protection, because friends are very important to primary age children. Explain to your children how their friends may be feeling and at the same time help them to involve the new friends in their play; e.g. invite your child's old friend and the old friend's new friend to come over. They could become involved in planning for a special goodbye at school, such as a lunchtime picnic for friends and perhaps a small gift for the teacher.

Important note. It is better with young children to keep things rather than to throw them out, even if they agree, because they don't understand that what they throw out will not be there for them when they next want it. This is particularly important with dummies or other comforters. These objects help children to build a bridge between the known and the unknown, and are especially important at times of change. If the comforter is something that can't be replaced, e.g. a special toy, make sure that it has a safe place for the trip where it can't get lost.

Younger children

- Babies and toddlers will not understand much of what it is all about. What matters most to them are parents so, if you can keep their routines as normal as you can, they will probably not be much affected by moving.
- Young children need practical information rather than words; e.g. a picture of the new home.
- If you are travelling by plane and your children have not been in one before, you can show them pictures and read stories about planes, and visit the airport to show them what it is like.
- Young children are likely to make up what they are not told, and they don't always know the words to ask what is worrying them—so keep them in the picture.
- Be aware of possible misunderstandings; e.g. if you tell them you have to leave some things behind, they may believe that they are going to be left behind.
- Make sure they know that the family and all the special things are going to be together in the new place. Young children often need to be told more than once.

Saying goodbye

Older children will want to say goodbye to their friends at a special time, such as a *See You Again Party*. Special events (they can become family traditions) are helpful to all people, including children, at major transition times. At the party, older children could give their friends a card with their new address (or a postcard already stamped and addressed to start them off) and an email address if you have one; and everyone could write or draw on a T-shirt for your children to keep. Remember to take lots of photos.

You could have information at the party about the new home; e.g. a large map with a line drawn from the old home to the new (if you know where it will be). Think up some games about moving or about special things from the new place (beach/hills/sports, etc.).

An address book with all the friends' addresses would be a good present.

You can have the same kind of party with special relatives if you are leaving them as well.

Chapter 4

On the Move

Packing

- Give older children responsibility for a special task of their own, e.g. pack their own toys, check the rooms to make sure nothing is left, take care of a pet. (Make sure to show you appreciate their help.)
- They can help with deciding what not to keep and help clean out unwanted belongings. It is important not to clean out children's things when they are not there.
- Mark the children's names clearly on the boxes which contain their things so you can find them easily.
- Make a pack of things for each child to take on the trip. Keep out some toys for children to have on the trip and as soon as they arrive.
- Don't pack school reports, health records, etc. Take them with you in the car or on the plane.
- One child could make a video of the move—help her to use a tripod or rest the camera on something firm to keep it steady. The video can be edited afterwards and will provide lots of fun when played in the future.

Moving day can be very confusing and scary for toddlers. Put yourself in their shoes and imagine everything you own and love being packed up around you and disappearing into a huge truck. Your house where you feel secure looks strange and empty. Your parents are busy. You have no idea how all this is going to end!

Toddlers need their special things to hang on to and to be told over and over again, as often as they need, that you and all their possessions will be with them at the end of the journey.

After everything is packed, take a last look around your house and garden with your children before leaving yourselves.

Toddlers need their special things to hang on to and to be told over and over again that you and all their possessions will be with them at the end of the journey.

Moving day

Try to have as much as you can planned and prepared in advance so you will not be too rushed. Be prepared for some things to go wrong—they usually do! And try to take it cheerfully.

If children can keep their routines as much as possible they will feel more secure. Try to keep these going until you leave and get them going as soon as you arrive at the new home: e.g. how they go to bed, meal-times, etc.

Plan for what you and the children will have to eat and drink during the day, and where the children can play so they will be safe while the removalists are packing and moving furniture.

If you are a breast-feeding mother, this will help your baby, so remember not to get too tired. Leave plenty of time for feeds.

Babies and toddlers

If you are a breast-feeding mother, this will help your baby, so remember not to get too tired. Leave plenty of time for feeds. It is likely that your baby will need more feeds at moving time. This will help reassure the baby and make sure that your milk supply does not diminish while you are busy.

Travelling by car with young babies is generally not too difficult, but once children are moving around long car trips can need more planning. It will help if you:

- travel at night or when young children are likely to sleep;
- stay somewhere overnight to break a long journey;
- allow frequent stops at places with children's facilities, e.g. parks, playgrounds;
- take snacks and drinks (water especially) for the trip;
- have some songs and games to play along the way. You can make up simple travel quizzes; e.g. count the semi-trailers before the next town, *I Spy*, who will be first to see a cow, etc.
- take some favourite toys and activities, including music.

Note: You can buy special travel trays that children can rest reading or colouring books on.

It also helps if a parent can sit in the back seat of the car with the children.

Chapter 5

Settling In

When you arrive

If you go into temporary accommodation

- Try to make this as near as possible to your new home so you can start getting to know the neighbourhood and, if you have school-age children, start them at the school they will be going on with.
- Keep separate the things that are special to your children so they can have them at this time.
- If you are in a motel, plan for an interesting outing with the children each day, e.g. to a park, shopping mall, playground, bus trip, or just a walk.

Your new home

If you have toddlers, do a safety check of the home as soon as you get there; e.g. protection from the street, electrical appliances, hot water, etc. When you are busy, unpacking is a time they could find something unsafe.

- Unpack the children's sleeping and special play and eating needs (pillow, cup, pair of pyjamas, toy, etc.) as soon as possible. Young children feel more secure in a new place if they have treasured and familiar things around them.
- Set up your youngest children's rooms first, with their own familiar things, even if you don't have a chair unpacked for unexpected visitors.
- Arrange the furniture in younger children's bedrooms in the same way as it was before so if they wake in the

night it feels familiar. Do this with your lounge room and kitchen furniture as well, at least at first, so the rooms your children use seem like home.

- Taking walks around the neighbourhood is a good break from unpacking and can help you get to know the possibilities (and some of the neighbours as well, if you speak to anyone who is out in their yard as you pass). You are likely to meet lots more people walking than driving.
- You don't have to do everything at once. It will be better for visitors, as well as your family, if you take time to get everyone settled before rushing to get everything straight.
- Make your backyard a friendly play space for children. Even if you know you will be moving again,

Unpack your child's special play things first

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it is worth making an effort for the time your children are there. Some things you can do might be:

- make a sand pit (you can do this in half an old tractor tyre);
- make a garden (even in pots);
- provide old tyres and tubes;
- make a rope swing if there is a suitable tree;
- let the children have some cardboard boxes from the move for cubby houses, for crawling through, building, etc.

Doing something like making a garden will also help you to have something local to talk about when you meet people in the area.

If you have a family pet, it can help give a sense of home to children in difficult times.

At this busy time it is important to MAKE family time.

New friends

'It is hard to break in and make friends. No one really wants to know about where you came from—it feels like a whole part of your life has just been taken away.'—Sarah (9).

If your children don't know anyone in the area, it will help if you can start some links with new friends. You could invite the neighbours over to meet you and ask them to bring their children. Make sure you are welcoming to the children and have something they like to drink or eat. Teach your children how to be friendly to others. (They will learn a lot about this from watching you.)

If you have close relatives you have left behind, e.g. grandparents, this is a good time for them to ring your children and keep in touch.

Older children, in particular, are likely to miss their friends for a while until they get busy and make new friends. You can help by:

- getting your children enrolled in some activities where they will meet others (if it is school holidays, e.g. learn to swim or a school holiday program.)
- allowing time to ring old friends and to write to them, especially in the early days. (They could send drawings and pictures if they don't write letters yet.)

Children make new friends; old best friends become old friends. Children may see them less often, but keep the warm feelings with old friends in places they have left. It is good to know you have a network of friends across the country as well as in your own town.

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Remind your children that they are lucky because they have two lots of friends—their new home friends and their old home friends. And your children are likely to have, or learn, special skills at making friends.

'You keep a best friend for a while—then stuff happens'—Anna (10).

Family customs and traditions

All families have their own traditions and ways of doing things. These are important to children's sense of security. They include things such as the way you say goodbye in the morning and the special little things you do when you put the children to bed. They also include the bigger things such as the way you celebrate birthdays and Christmas. If a family is very busy or stressed, it is easy to not bother with these things, but it is important to make the effort to keep them going.

Think about how you can continue the customs that are important to children and that you can follow in the new home, but also develop some special customs for moving and for your new life.

Family customs can be as simple as fish and chips on the beach once a week. Think, too, about what you can do for birthdays and other special celebration times. It might mean something like a Christmas teleconference with all the family. One father, whose grown-up children are interstate, still beats time on saucepans when he sings 'Happy Birthday' over the phone. This is part of what makes birthdays special for his family.

Make some extra time to spend with children during and after the move

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Chapter 6

Moving to a New School

Finding a school or child care

Parents sometimes worry about moving schools and wonder if their children will be disadvantaged. In fact, because young children learn largely by experience, it can give them educational advantages because of the new experiences they have—new places, new people, travelling, new words, different kinds of countryside.

Planning for a new school

Ring the education department in the new district ahead of time and check out what schools are in the area. If you know other families in the area, or you get a chance to visit in advance and talk to people, ask them about schools and child care. Don't just go by what they recommend but ask them why they recommend a particular school or service. Then you will know whether they are looking for the same things that you are.

Find the best school to suit you and your children in advance if you can, especially if you move in term time. This will depend on what you want for your children; e.g. distance from your new home, ease of transport, whether your children know anyone in the neighbourhood who is going to the school and could be their friend.

One of the biggest problems for children can be the differences in the education system between the different states. For example, there may be different ways of teaching reading and writing, and different names for school levels. Look for a school for your child which will support him in learning in the style he has begun.

It is important that the school you choose suits you and your child. If schools and parents have different values it can make it difficult for children. Think about what is important to you—understanding and support, parent participation, class structures, opportunities for creativity.

Changing schools can be a good experience for young children as long as they are helped to settle in and are happy in the new school.

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Special needs children

Contact the education department in your new district ahead of time to find out which schools provide for the particular needs of your child. Then contact the school so staff can prepare for your child. The school may also be able to tell you of other resources in the area. Make sure that you get up-to-date reports and assessments from the professionals who are caring for your children's health and education. Ask them for suggestions and referrals for your new place. See what help your employer may be able to give with any special equipment your child needs. (If you are a Defence family the Regional Education Liaison Officer (REDLO) is a valuable resource when moving. Contact the REDLO in your state or territory for assistance as quickly as possible after receiving a posting order).

concentration on basic skills, extra-curricular activities, opportunities for sport, etc., and ask about them.

Some questions to ask schools

Make a list of your own for what you want to know. Take the list with you when you go to see the school, because it is easy to forget what you wanted to ask.

- How do you help new children to settle in? (Schools which have a buddy system, where a new child is paired with a child who has been there before, can help children to settle in more quickly.)
- What uniform and equipment does my child need? Are there special things that other children have, e.g. kinds of school bag, shoes, etc? (Having similar things to others will help your child to belong.)
- Will you be able to help my child carry on learning to write in the same way she is using?
- How does your teaching include children who need more help or more extension in parts of the work?
- How are the classes organised (e.g. multi-aged classes) and what will this mean to my child?
- May I stay for a while, for example help in the classroom, if my child takes some time to settle in?
- May I talk to the staff (e.g. at a staff meeting) about what it means to children and families to move to a new home?
- Do you have a way to meet other parents of children in the same class? (Some schools have a system for sharing phone numbers and this could enable your child to meet classmates before starting at the new school.)

Keep in mind any special education needs your child might have. Ask what the school offers.

Schools which have a buddy system can help children to settle in more quickly

Helping your child settle in to school

Even if you move during term time your child does not have to start school the day after you move in. Take some time to prepare the way first.

- It helps at the start if your child has another child to go to school with, so if you can organise this it is worth making the effort.
- Show children the way to school from your home.
- Explore the school so your child knows where to find the library, tuckshop, toilets and choose a special place for pick-up after school.
- Take your children to meet their new teacher so they, as well as you, can talk to the teacher about their experiences and feelings. Children respond to being welcomed into a school, and having a teacher to greet them will help them feel at home. Some schools have a certificate of welcome for new students.
- If you are able to, offer to help at the school. Even if you will not be long in the new home and you don't think it is worth joining a committee, it will help your children to settle in. (And you will meet people as well.) If you work during the day see about helping with weekend sport or on fetes, etc.
- When your child starts school, invite other children from her class over to play.
- Be very reliable with arrangements for picking up your children, especially at first.
- When they get home be a listener, not a questioner. Children often won't talk if you ask too many questions but, if you sit down with them in a friendly way over a snack after school, they will often chat about what has happened.
- Make sure the staff know any particular difficulties and strengths your children have.
- If the school work is very different from what your child has done before, it may help to get some extra tutoring to bridge any learning gaps and help your child's confidence.
- Help your child to join some extra-curricular groups they are interested in. This will help them to make new friends.
- Make sure the teachers know that you have just moved to the area, in case your child has any difficulties.

Starting in a new school

Some of the questions that may be on your child's mind are:

- Will I be able to cope with the work?
- Will I be able to make friends?
- Will the teacher like me?
- Will I be able to find the canteen, library, toilets, etc? What if I get it wrong?

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Helping children overcome problems

- If your child finds it hard at first, you and the school need to work together to help him.
- You need to recognise that his fears are very real to him. Smile at the same time showing him that you know that school is safe and you have confidence that he will learn to feel better.

Children usually do best at school with similar age classmates

An eight-year-old boy enrolled at a new school and was not settling. His mum phoned the Regional Education Liaison Officer for assistance. After two weeks of constant crying the officer visited. The child seemed happy and the officer asked how school had been. The child replied 'Oh great' He was asked why today had been different and he replied, 'The teacher smiled at me today.'

Differences between states

Although all schools help children to progress through the learning areas they need, schools are structured differently in each state, and sometimes this can cause misunderstandings.

'Why am I doing Year 1 again? I'm not dumb'—Michael (6).

If your child has changed to a school in another state, the year levels may have different names. This could mean, for example, that your child is in a class called Year 1 twice, even though the work is different. It is helpful to prepare children for the new class names in advance, and explain that the work is progressing even though the name stays the same. It is not usually a good idea to try to move a child out of his age group to avoid this, as the social interaction in school is very important and children usually do best with similar age classmates.

Starting school problems

'Can you stay until we go into class?'—Sam (7).

With the previous suggestions to help children settle in, most children do well at making the change to a new school. However, some children do not settle easily. This depends on lots of things, including what is happening at home, their previous experiences, and their temperament. For some children it can take a long time before they feel secure in the new environment. Often the playground and free time are the hardest for them to deal with.

Question any suggestions that the problems are your fault. If you are given advice about your child that you don't believe is right, you can question it, and talk it over with a health professional if you aren't sure. For example, *'Don't help in the classroom because he gets upset when you leave'*—A teacher.

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Note: It isn't always easy to find someone to give you support in a new place. You could ask your doctor, teacher, or a local community health service to suggest someone who works with children's problems who can give you support and advice if you need it. Your workplace may also have some suggestions. (Defence families have an added resource of REDLOs in each state.)

Some things that may help

- Look for the positive experiences in your child's day and help him to build on them.
- Do so/se things to help around the school so your child knows you are there.
- Let your child know where you will be during the day.
- Give him something of yours to keep for you during the day.
- Ask the teacher to have an activity for him when he first gets to school so he doesn't have to cope with the free time.
- Ask your child what he thinks will help. Some children prefer to be taken to school by a parent of another child so they don't have to say goodbye to you at the school.
- Arrange for your child to be able to ring you if he needs to (this is not always possible).
- Listen to his fears and show you understand but that you are not worried about him.
- Read (or make up) a story about a child in a similar situation (See resources).
- Be very reliable about pick-up times.
- It might help to make a progress chart of the hours in the day when your child feels sad, the hours when he feels OK, the hours he feels happy, and the hours that he is asleep. If you keep it for a couple of weeks he can see his progress towards feeling better. You will also get an idea of the times that are most difficult for him and when he may need more help. (If he is not progressing then you need to think about what else you can do to help.)

Experience with children who do not want to go to school or who are distressed at school shows that once they feel settled they usually do very well.

Example Chart. (Make one to fit your child's day. For younger children use fewer columns.) The child could colour in red for happy, blue for sad, green for asleep, and yellow for OK. Or you could use stickers.

Danny's Chart—Week One

	BEFORE SCHOOL	MORNING SCHOOL	RECESS TIME	BEFORE LUNCH	LUNCH TIME	AFTER LUNCH	AFTER SCHOOL	EVENING	
Sunday									
Monday									
Tuesday									
Wednesday									
Thursday									
Friday									
Saturday									

- Talk with your child about the times of day that are meaningful to him, and make the times on the chart according to the times he talks about.
- Remind your child that being able to have different places and people in our lives adds richness, and help him to celebrate the new experiences.

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Chapter 7

Moving to New Child Care

Choosing suitable child care

For very young children who are in some kind of out-of-home care, choosing the most suitable care is very important to your child's feelings of wellbeing and to their development.

As with schools, it is good to plan ahead, check out the possibilities, and ask what you need to help make your choice.

Some questions you may want to ask a new child care centre (some of these questions apply to family day care as well)

- How big is the group my child is in?
- How many staff do you have for that group? Will my child be able to have a special staff member to relate to?
- Will I be able to stay with my child until he is comfortable about me leaving?
- Will my child be able to keep his comforter with him during the day?
- Do you do any special things to help new children settle in?
- What activities do you have where parents can meet each other?
- Will you take into account my child's likes and dislikes for food?
- How do you manage children's behaviour? (Time-out is not appropriate for young children who have moved house.)
- Do you have any other services, such as health checks, available through your centre?
- If you have more than one child who will be in child care, ask whether they can be together.

Toddlers need to practise being independent

- Let the staff know that your children have just had a change and so need continuity of staff in child care.
- If your child is at present in a child care service, ask if the centre would be willing to be contacted by your child's present carers to help ensure an easy transfer. If there can be similar routines and ways of relating to your child in the new centre it will help, especially if the child is very young.

Note: Some kindergartens and child care centres have policies and practices about children's play with guns. If you or your partner are in the Defence Force, perhaps involved in gunnery or likely to go to war, ask about the service's philosophy about guns and war play. If the service has policies that discourage children from playing games that involve pretend guns ask them how they talk to the children about the difference between play with guns and when they are needed in the community, e.g. to protect people's safety.

Starting new child care

Whether in school or kindergarten or child care, your child can bring in some interesting experiences and knowledge, as well as learning from the new situation. You or your partner may have something of interest from your work or hobbies that the other children will enjoy hearing about and will help your child to become known. For example, a parent may be able to come to school in uniform and explain why they wear it, have

Whether in school or kindergarten or child care, your child can bring in some interesting experiences and knowledge, as well as learning from the new situation.

Choosing suitable child care is important to your child's wellbeing and development

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an interesting craft or musical skills, or arrange a visit to a parent's workplace.

In starting new child care, your first job—and the job of the staff—is to help your child find a staff member she feels comfortable with when you are not there.

- If you don't have to start work yourself for a while, you can spend time with your child until she gets to know the new person who is caring for her. You can help your child get to know one of the carers by staying near while your child plays with the carer. This way your child will learn that you think this new person is someone you trust to care for her, and she will learn to trust the carer.
- You can spend the same getting-to-know-you time if you choose family day care.
- Offer to bring something from your old life that your child knows, to put up in the centre; e.g. a picture from your old home or work, photographs, a picture map to show where the other parent is if one parent is away, etc.
- If possible, walk there with your child at first so she can make a link between home and where she is going. You may also be able to take her on a walk there from your workplace.
- If your child is very unsettled, try staying with her for a couple of hours for a few days and then both leave. Then try leaving her for only short times at first, tell her you will be coming back, and do so, so she learns that you will always find her again. Come back before she gets distressed.
- Some children are helped by having something of yours to care for while you are not there.
- Some children may need to keep their special things with them; e.g. in a small back-pack rather than in a locker.
- Keep in touch with the staff to check how your child is coping and how you can all work together to support her.

If you are in an occupation where one parent is away a lot, explain to the staff what this means to your children. The class may want to learn about the places that the parent has been or see them on a map.

Grandparents

Plan for times like Grandparents' Day. You may be able to find another special person to go with your child but, if you have not been there long, this may not be possible. You could take a picture of your child's grandparents, or maybe a video or recorded telephone message where the grandparent could give a special message from far away to all the children.

Chapter 8

If Children Have Problems

'People may not realise, but moving is a bit like when someone dies.'—Jack (12).

A young child who has just moved house, and who may also have a parent away, has already had some big losses in her life, so may not be able to trust that what she knows will stay the same. It will take time for her to feel secure in the new situation. At the same time she is building new strengths which will help her in managing the changes that are part of everyone's life.

It is common for children to regress to younger behaviour, to cling or whine, or to be disobedient if they are stressed. Where possible, accept the behaviour. It will pass when the child feels more secure.

Every child and every adult copes with change in a different way. Many will take it in their stride, others will need more support. Change is always an opportunity for new learning.

Some things you can do

- Let your children know that you understand how they are feeling and that you have confidence in them to learn to cope with the new situation.
- Help children to talk about their feelings—happy or sad or cross. Let them know that you sometimes feel that way too.
- You might say something like: 'It makes you cross sometimes when everything is different at your new school.' If the child doesn't respond, you could say, 'I know some things are hard for you. I will always listen and try to help if you want to tell me about it.'
- Talk about the good things about the change and what they are learning.
- If they are old enough, ask them what would help them to feel better. You could talk to them about times in the past when they have managed new situations, e.g. starting school or kindergarten, and get them to tell you (or remind them) what they did that helped them then. This helps to build their confidence.

- Opportunities to re-enact what has happened, with puppets, sand play, drawings, and pretend play, will gradually help children to deal with their feelings.
- For very young toddlers, playing come-and-go games, finding lost objects, and hide-and-seek, if they like it, can help them to learn that you will always be there for them.
- A bedtime meditation (there are some very good books and tapes available) can help children to talk about their problems and to feel more relaxed.

Sleep problems

Often bedtimes and sleep times are when children's worries disturb them most. Night times can be scary times, especially in a strange house, where they are not sure where you are, or even if you are still there. Children may find it difficult to go to sleep, or wake at night, or want to sleep with you. They will gradually feel secure again, but it can take time.

There is nothing wrong with parents and children sharing a bed as long as everyone it happy about it. It is the way that most children in the world sleep. And it does not last forever. As children get more confident, it is more trouble for them to get out of their warm bed in the night and find the parents' bed than to turn over and go back to sleep. It is when worries are keeping them awake that they are likely to seek your bed.

If one parent is away on business it may not be a good idea to let a child come into your bed, because it can cause confusion and sometimes upset when the partner comes home. In this case it may help to do what is called 'camping out'. Put a small mattress and sleeping bag alongside your bed so a child who is afraid in the night can come and sleep near you for comfort.

- Leave a light on in the passage so, if children do wake at night, they don't feel totally lost, or
- Put a day bed in the child's bedroom so if she wakes in the night and needs comfort, a parent can go there and still lie down and get his or her own sleep.

Clinging

Clinging is common in young children. Children usually cling because they are afraid of losing the parent. Often the parent feels frustrated and tries to encourage or push the child to move away. This can make the child feel more insecure and cling more. Being as reliable as possible until the child feels more confident is the best

Things that will help behavioural problems include:

- Notice when he does well.
- Give extra loving and cuddles.
- Avoid comparing with others.
- Avoid comparing with himself; e.g. 'Did we leave our big boy at the other house?'
- Let him know that you will not allow behaviour that is hurtful to himself or anyone else.
- Listen to his needs and feelings—even if you can't do what he wants, it helps to know that someone really understands.

Punishment is not helpful when a child is reacting to grief or stress. It says to the child that you don't understand his distress, and is likely to add to the problem.

way to help children overcome fears. Always tell your child when you are leaving, even for a short time.

Another suggestion is to make *Special Time* to be with each child on his or her own each day. This should be no longer than you can manage, perhaps 15 minutes, and should be at a time where you will not be interrupted so the child can depend on it. This can make quite an amazing difference to children.

Discipline

When children are unsettled there are likely to be more behaviour problems for a while. If you have just moved house, discipline methods that involve separation from you such as time-out (or controlled crying) are likely to make the problem worse, because it is a kind of separation that is causing the problem.

One option is time-with-a-parent. This means that, instead of time-out if the child is misbehaving, you can say that she seems not to be managing so needs to be with you for a while. Take her away from whatever she is doing and keep her with you for a few minutes.

Another option for older children is to give a choice. For example, if a child is being disruptive at the dinner table she can choose to stay and eat with the family or to leave the table and eat later. Or if she is making a noise while others are watching a television show she can choose to stay and watch the show or make a noise in another room.

However, always try first to work out what is happening to cause the problem. It might help to think about when it usually happens and what else is happening in the child's life at this time.

Some problems can be prevented by planning. For example, a child who is feeling stressed at a new school may be aggressive and difficult after school. If you plan to have a snack and a quiet activity, e.g. some free time for outdoor play, watching a favourite video, or doing something else she likes after school, it can help prevent the difficult behaviour.

If you allow children to behave a bit younger than their age for a time, while at the same time setting reasonable limits for safety and care for others, it will help your child to move forward again when he is ready.

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Blaming Mum

Children sometimes 'take their feelings out' on the safest person around—and often this is Mum. They may blame Mum for having to move and for the problems they are having, or just say 'I hate you'.

This can be one of the hardest things for you to deal with. After all, you are doing your best to make things work. However, if you look at it from the children's point of view, they are in a new situation where there are no safe ways to express negative feelings except to the person they can trust not to either retaliate or leave them.

- Try to respond to the feelings behind the action rather than get caught up in your own hurt feelings.
  — You could say something like, 'I can see you are feeling really upset about ... let's think about what we could do to help ...' or 'I can see you feel really cross, but you must not hit. Let's think about ...'
- Punishment or passing the blame to someone else does not help.
  — If you say 'It is all the fault of Daddy's job,' it is likely to make children more upset and confused.

It is important that children know you can manage their behaviour and will not let them hurt anyone (including you). They need to know they can depend on you to keep them safe, even from their own feelings.

It is important that children know you can manage their behaviour and will not let them hurt anyone (including you).

Babies need their 'special' people to be with them; a regular carer is important when parents are absent

'Most children are prepared for society through family socialisation in social relationships. When those children are moving localities ... they must form a new process of socialisation.'
(Fields, 1998.)

Problems with friends

One of the biggest issues for children of school age is 'Who will be my friend?'

Here are some suggestions to help:

- When your child starts at the new school, make an extra effort to invite other children over to play and make them very welcome—have a video or other activity to help ease the situation at first.
- Make sure that your child has similar clothes, school bag, etc. to those of the other children so she can feel like one of the group.
- You might need to help your child with skills such as suggestions on how to join in with a group; e.g. offer an idea for the game, rather than just ask to play. For instance, if the children are playing mothers and fathers, your child could say something like 'I could be a child' or 'I could be the uncle'.
- Your child will need you to listen and have confidence in her ability to make friends, rather than get too anxious or take over. Tempting though it is, it isn't helpful to ask every day after school 'Did you have someone to play with today?'
- Remember that, from time to time, all young children, especially girls, feel that no-one is their friend. If it seems to be really upsetting your child, check with the teacher—it may be just your child's perception.
  If your child is isolated, ask the teacher to help.

Ensure that your child can feel like one of the group

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Chapter 9

Parent at Home

If you are an at-home parent you may feel a bit 'flat' after your partner goes to a new job and your children to their new activities. It is important to share your feelings with your partner as well as listening to your partner's new experiences.

'You move to a place, you get unpacked and your husband goes ... the big thing that sticks in my mind is the isolation and lack of connectedness'—June.

You will be settling into a new community that has its ways of doing things and its shared memories that you are not part of. But remember that you are bringing new things from your own experiences to contribute.

People don't always reach out at first—they may not even know that you are new, or they may be a bit wary of new people, or just be too busy with their own lives to be thinking of newcomers. You need to take the first step and say 'Hi' to someone waiting at the school gate or to a neighbour over the garden fence. Asking for information about the area and taking an interest in what is happening there are good ways to start. Most people respond to others who take an interest in them and what they are proud of.

Take it slowly at first so you get to know people, and then you can choose whom you would like to have as friends.

Everyone, wherever they are, needs help from time to time. Work out a plan for someone you can contact or phone if you feel really stressed. Check whether there is a telephone Helpline for parents in your state.

Even if it means an interstate call, it is important that you get support, especially if you are coping alone in the early days after the move. Find out in advance about short-term child care options you can use if you need a break.

Things that might help you are:

- Get out and get a feel for the area—check out shops, health services, etc.
- Check the local papers, the library, and the local council to find out what is going on and what you might want to join.
- You might find a parents' group, e.g. at your local child health centre.
- Volunteer—at school, church, or wherever there is a need. Working together is a good way to make new friends.
- Walk, don't drive, and say hello to people you meet.
- Invite a neighbour in for coffee.
- Keep in contact with your old friends as much as you need to, by making phone calls at the cheap times, until you build new links.
- Look for a babysitter early so you can go out some evenings, e.g. to classes or events if you get the opportunity.

Chapter 10

If You Move Often

Children need a sense of where they belong in the world.

Children need a sense of where they belong in the world, so if you are likely to move often it is worth thinking of some ways to help children make sense of this. Here are some suggestions.

- Help your children make a book about your family moves. It can include photographs of each home, a special memento of each place, a few words that children said about the place, names of friends, school, special things to do. You could also include photographs of grandparents' homes, favourite play spots in each place, etc.
- Develop some family moving traditions, e.g. special Beginning and Ending parties or meals, what you sing in the car, what you pack for the trip, etc.
- Leave something of your own family at each home; e.g. put in a plant or tree in the garden, leave a welcome message to the new people, add something to the home.
- Have a book of comments from friends in each place, to take with you and add to.
- Collect something from the place you have lived in, e.g. a rock, shell, souvenir toy or animal, and keep the collection in a special place.

Going back 'home'

Going 'home' to visit your own parents and family can bring its challenges as well as joys. Things will have gone on while you are away, just as your life has gone on. Furniture may have been changed around or sold. Your at-home family will have shared experiences that come up in conversation and leave you feeling excluded. Generally, you and your children will have been able to keep in touch with the grandparents in some way, so there should also be shared long-distance experiences for you to talk about.

Some families find that it helps to build some new traditions about visiting home. For example, a special family meal or picnic when you first get back, where everyone has a chance to say something about what they have been doing since you left. Each reunion could have a photograph which could go into a book about reunion times, with some writing about what is important at that time.

Some children (and their parents) like to have a tour of their grandparents' home so they can see what is different and what is the same, and hear about why changes were made.

Some Final Tips

- Remember that what is most important to children's security is their parents.
- Be positive. Every move has an element of adventure.
- Make some extra time to spend with children during and after the move.
- Involve your children so they feel part of and in control (at least a bit) of what is happening to them. Don't do things behind their backs.
- Put yourself in their shoes. Ask yourself how you would feel if this was happening to you. This will give you the best clues to deal with any problems.
- Show children by example how to manage changes, meet new people, say goodbye to old friends.
- Try to keep up the family routines your children are used to.
- Include some rest and some fun in every day, no matter how busy.
- Spend time listening to children and explaining what they want to know.
- Remember that home is where the family is, and that relationships matter much more than the place where you live.

Children's development

The following is a guide to how children's stages of development can affect their responses to changes in their lives. (Remember that all children are different and this is a guide only—you do best by learning to know your own children and their development and responses).

	DEVELOPMENT	WHAT BABIES NEED	RESPONSE TO STRESS
0–1 (Baby)	Babies depend completely on the people they know best and who care for them	Their special people to be with them.	Babies are very sensitive to stress in their carers and may respond by crying a lot, waking a lot, and being hard to settle or have feeding problems.
	Babies are learning about the world by the simple caring routines that are used with them—the way you feed them, change them, and put them to sleep.	Gently responding to their needs in the same way, helping them to learn that the world is a safe and loving place.	If routines are changed or done in different ways by different people, the baby may become unsettled and unable to feed and sleep well.
	Young babies cannot understand that people exist when they can't see them. It is by the regular coming back and attending to their needs that they learn that the world is a safe place to be.	Carers who are there to respond when they cry.	If their needs are not met they can learn to feel unsafe and not develop trust that the world is safe for them to be in.
	Older babies learn that the people they love and need are there even when they can't see them.	To be with their carers almost all the time. As they get to crawling they can manage very short separations but will easily get upset if they can't find their 'safe' person.	Separation from the main carers may cause distress, sleep and feeding problems.
	Babies don't have an understanding of time.	It isn't possible to reassure a baby by saying that you will come back soon, or in the morning. Babies need you there to feel safe.	

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1–3 (Toddler)

DEVELOPMENT	WHAT THEY NEED	RESPONSE TO STRESS
Toddlers need to practise being independent in what they say and do—to do things for themselves and to say 'No!'	Opportunities to control some of their world and to practise doing things for themselves.	Children of this age are most likely to show stress by behaviour rather than telling you.
Changes in their world are scary for toddlers and they often need to keep to the same routines so that they feel safe.	To have you do the same things in the same way, e.g. food, bedtime routines, stories.	They may go back to earlier behaviours, e.g. forget toilet training, become clingy or 'whiney', wake at night or have problems going to bed.
Young toddlers are not yet sure what is them and what is not them. They don't yet know that their bodies are part of them.	To be allowed not to share their special toys, etc. They may need their special things to be with them.	Some may have tantrums or become aggressive.
They are learning some words to help say how they feel.	Someone to listen and to teach them the words for their feelings.	Stress can delay learning new skills such as speech for a time.
They think their parents can read their minds.	The toddler thinks you know where he is even if you can't see him, e.g. if he gets lost he will think you should have found him.	
Young toddlers don't understand that their feelings are separate, and may think that if they feel cross or upset you are cross with them.	To know that you are not cross with them when they feel cross, or afraid, or anxious when they are feeling afraid.	
Toddlers often think that things happen by magic—e.g. that objects do things on purpose.	Comfort and simple explanations.	
They do not understand that changes can be lasting.	Support and love when they have a loss. Comforters such as dummies or special toys can help.	
Toddlers do not have an understanding of time and space, e.g. that you will come back soon, or how far away you are.	You to understand that their fears are real for them. Introduce new or scary situations carefully.	
Toddlers are making big changes from being always supported by parents to learning to manage times apart, e.g. at night and sometimes during the day.	Practise at coming and going from the safe base of parents being there, reassurance when they need it, and understanding of their fears. Come-and-go games.	

'Are we going to take the footpath to the new house?'—Jack (2).

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4–6 (Preschooler)	DEVELOPMENT	WHAT THEY NEED	RESPONSE TO STRESS
	Children have learned that their bodies and minds are separate.	Support as they practise new skills (including telling 'stories')—help with learning what is real and not real.	Children may cling and have difficulty separating from parents, e.g. not want to go to school or preschool.
	Concrete thinkers—may not be realistic, e.g. you are moving house because of something they did.	Clear information and response to questions. They often ask the same question several times as they try to understand what it means.	Some children become aggressive and disobedient.
	Better but still limited understanding of space and time.	Clear examples of what is meant when talking about these things.	May make up 'stories' about what they wish would happen.
	Learning to share and play with others.	Opportunities to play with other children, help with social skills if they are having difficulty.	Children may use self-comforting behaviours a lot, e.g. masturbate, cling to dummy or other comforter.
	Preschoolers have friendships but they are not the deeper friendships of older children.	Opportunities to meet other children and make new friends after moving.	
	Need to please parents. May not tell the truth about things they think will upset parents.	Help to learn what is real and what is not real and what is a wish.	
	Very close to and concerned about parents.	Reassurance of parents' love, and care, especially if they are in trouble.	

'How far is a long way?'—Brian (4) (For Brian it was a long way from home to his preschool—about two kilometres.)

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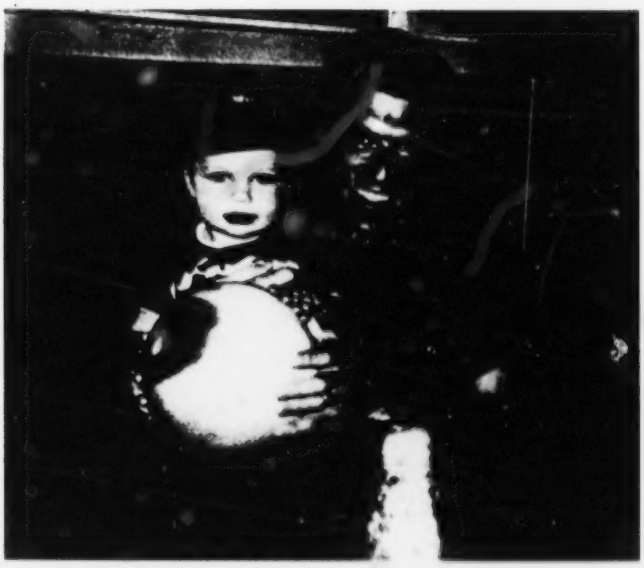
6–8 (Early school years)

DEVELOPMENT	WHAT THEY NEED	RESPONSE TO STRESS
Starting to work out what causes things—may blame themselves or others, e.g. a parent.	Clear explanations and reassurance.	May be disobedient or aggressive.
Speak well so can talk about feelings	Parents to take time to listen and understand where they are coming from.	May not want to go to school.
More knowledge and understanding of space and time—can think about the future. May want lots of detailed information.	Practical explanations and examples that help understanding.	May cheat or tell 'lies'.
Learning to work out reality from fantasy.	Support and understanding and clear explanations.	May have nightmares.
Rules and being fair become important.	Opportunity to practise learning about games with rules.	May have headaches, tummy-aches.
Moving from the world of home and adults to the world of childhood.	Support in meeting other children, acceptance of this new step.	Problems with school work, can't concentrate.
Friends become important.	Opportunities to develop friendships—help with skills if needed. Opportunities to keep in contact with old friends.	
Achievement at school and in sport is more important to them.	Help with skills if needed. Opportunities to succeed.	

'I was afraid I would not be able to find the way back to Renmark.'—Caroline (8) who became very sad after moving from a country town to the city and did not want to go to school.



Be positive. Every move has an element of adventure

Resources and further reading

Bowler, P. & Linke, P. (1998) *Your Child from One to Ten*. Melbourne: ACER.

Burrett, J. (1999) *To and Fro Children*: A guide to successful parenting after divorce. 3rd edn. Sydney: Carrington. (About access parenting.)

Child and Youth Health Website www.cyh.com—400 topics on parenting and child health for parents of babies, children and young people.

Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (1998) *Moving Schools: A Guide for Families, Employers and Schools*. Carlton: Curriculum Corporation. (Detailed information about patterns of schooling in each state, including names of year levels.)

Defence Community Organisation—for families in the Australian Defence Forces. (Offers support for families.)

Defence pamphlets *Changing Schools Checklist*, and *Student Information Portfolio* (available from REDLO in your state or territory.)

Family Information Network for Defence. Tel: 1800 020 031.

Garth, M. (1991) *Starbright: Meditations for Young Children*. Collinsdove.

Hall, J. (1993) *Confident Kids*. Lothian. (Suitable for children four years or over.)

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Fields, R. (1998) Child in the social context (unpublished assignment for a child care course).

Magarey Institute (1993) *We Can Manage Change*. SA: Child and Youth Health.

Imber Black, E. & Roberts, J. (1992) *Rituals for Our Times: Celebrating, Healing and Changing Our Lives and Our Relationships*. NY: HarperPerennial.

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